MARTIN LUTHER.

ADDRESS OF HON. A. J. HERR.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: I shall not detain you long. I can tell you nothing but what you already know. I can only give you back your own thoughts, and they, perhaps, dressed up in the same garments that you ourselves may have clothed them in. In thinking upon this theme, I have always had a half-formed impression that Luther was a kind of thunderbolt. The thunderbolt is forged in the workshop of the clouds in stillness, and its quality of danger is not feared until it descends and shatters something. Like it, the human thunderbolt is brought forth in obscurity, and his existence is not suspected until he shocks the universe of mind with blows that make a world reel and stagger under them. Four hundred years ago in an out-of-the-way German village the Luther thunderbolt appeared, and men knew it not until one day his hammer, nailing the ninety-five propositions on the Wittenburg church door, echoed through the world and aroused it from its long sleep of sloth and degradation. It was the meridian hour for that hammer to strike, for the whole world was weltering in moral putrefaction. Satanic iniquity washed over the land like a flood of filth, drowning virtue, morality and decency. Pope, prince and people were deaf and dumb to the voice of conscience, and all alike were "waltzing down the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire." Ignorance fed superstition until superstition, grim, weird and baleful, had chained and manacled the reason of men. Leo X., in order to maintain his splendid retinue and magnificent extravagance, laid enormous burdens upon his subjects. Kings and emperors stooped obedient to his will by compelling the nobility to contribute, while they, in turn, ground the faces of the poor. The tinkle of Friar Tetzel's bell was ringing through

the empire proclaiming the sale of indulgences for the foulest sins and as sure means to ward off the wrath of God and save the guiltiest soul from perdition. The holiest sentiments of humanity were outraged. Such a thing as pity for suffering and distress was laughed to scorn. The awful shadow of the Church fell upon the land like a starless midnight, darkening homes instead of cheering them, strangling thought instead of freeing it, enthralling conscience instead of enlightening it. Fraud, violence and oppression, lies, insincerity and untruth, prevailed everywhere—on the throne, in the Church, among all ranks and classes. The spirit of lawlessness sent out from his castle the armed baron and his retainers to ravage and despoil field and town. The compliant temper of the Church, too corrupt to stop these evils, encouraged them and shared in their fruits. A sullen discontent was abroad.

Bitter poverty made the black bread of the peasants blacker and harder than it ever had been before. The deep longing for relief seemed to be fated to disappointment. The sad, wistful prayer for help and deliverance met with no response. For every effort toward a better condition of things was cruelly crushed out with fire and sword. The ponderous jaws of the dungeon opened and swallowed up in darkness the few brave spirits who here and there dared to struggle for something better, and what the dungeon spared the stake claimed as its own. But the righteous Judge of all the earth looked down from above, and heard the cry, "How long, O Lord, how long." For beneath the surface strange forces were at work like veins of fire in the secret places of the earth, ready to burst out in a mighty upheaval.

In the fullness of time and by God's appointment, Luther emerged from this festering mass of wickedness and challenged the makers and abettors of it to mortal combat. It was to be a life-and-death struggle! There he stood, the champion of religious liberty, freedom of thought and Christian civilization. It was a grand sight. On one side stood a pale, frail, feeble monk, with a few timid friends, without power or influence, unless, as he himself said, God would be his helper. On the other side stood the organized power of a proud Church entrenched behind the accumulated traditions of a thousand

years, with untold wealth at her command and the mysterious control of priestly craft over the minds and hearts of millions of devotees, with kings and emperors ready to obey her beck and nod, and all these means and appliances concentrated and consolidated as an engine of destruction at the absolute disposal of the head of the Church, to be used by him as he might please, without pity or remorse! Which would win, the little monk or the mighty Church? But the gage of battle had been thrown down, and the rulers were not slow to pick it up and accept the issue. They first tried to coax and flatter him, but that failed. They then tried to silence him with the threat of pains and penalties, making strenuous efforts to counteract the effect of his teaching. He was denounced as a heretic, villified and abused in scurillous language. But he was not to be deterred, for necessity was laid upon him to go on. His writings were condemned to be burned by the common hangman. And then the papal bull of excommunication was fulminated against him, and that meant in those days that whoever would give him a cup of water, or a crust of bread, or a night's shelter from cold or storm or in sickness, would be boomed to perdition. But, nothing daunted, Luther met threat with threat, defiance with defiance, and retaliated in kind by burning the Pope's bull in the public market square at Wittenberg and scattering the ashes to the four winds of heaven. Those ashes, carried by the invisible couriers of the air, fertilized the earth and produced a noble stock of men. At last he was summoned before the Imperial Diet of Worms; and when his friends Hutten and Sickingen entreated him not to place himself in the power of his enemies, he replied, I will go to Worms if there are as many devils as there are tiles on the roofs of the houses! And to Worms he went, escorted on his way by a multitude of nearly two thousand students and horsemen. Before that august body, composed of the Emperor, the Elector, Archduke, councillors, cardinals, princes and lords arrayed in scarlet and purple, studded with diamonds and other precious gems, with ornaments of silver and gold, reflecting the beams of the setting sun, and making a magnificent picture of regal pomp and old-world splendor, he appeared, acknowledged his writings, and in a speech of two hours defended the doctrine of salvation through faith.

He concluded his argument with these memorable words: "Unless I am refuted by the testimony of Scripture and clearest proof, I can not recant. Here I take my stand. I can do no otherwise, so help me God." There spoke the hero—the hero who in the loftiness of his soul forgets himself, sinks all personal considerations in the sublime conviction that his cause is everlastingly right. It requires no stretch of imagination to conceive that England's Wycliffe, Bohemia's Huss and Italy's Savanarola were there applauding with ghostly hands the courage of that soldier of the cross whom their prophetic souls had seen in deep dreams and visions of the night!

He left a conqueror, though seemingly beaten, for their victory was their defeat, because is it not written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent!"

But Luther was not a religious reformer only; he was, also, a liberator of thought. Learning, then, was a sealed book to all but the rich, and those who intended to enter the Church. While it is true that many schools and universities were established and flourished, yet the favored few only could gain admission to them. Learning was claimed to be the special property of the superior class; it was believed to be the best thing to keep the common people in fear and ignorance, and that man was looked upon as dangerous who thought that they had any right to the knowledge of the truth. But that was not Luther's way of thinking. He believed they had a right to education, and was untiring in his efforts to establish schools for their benefit. His translation of the Bible into his mother tongue unlocked a storehouse of wisdom and poetry and sacred story which the common people received with gladness and surprise. It brought to their very doors what they had long yearned for. It did more to clarify the intellectual atmosphere and to stimulate the growing desire for learning which was sweeping over the nation like a wholesome influence, than perhaps any single circumstance of that age. His labors were incessant and almost incredible, throwing off letters and lectures and pamphlets and sermons with the ease and facility of a machine. He never stopped to polish a

phrase or to veneer a thought. His heart was in his work, and that was the reason why he never wearied, but went straight on, uttering in strong, homely Saxon the intense convictions of his soul, and hurling his metal-like arguments through the ranks of his opponents like cannon balls crashing through the trees of a dead and dying forest. One of the consequences of this prodigious energy was to liberate the human mind, for it is true as Michelet, the French historian, said: "Who can estimate the gratitude we owe him? We can not think or write an hour without remembering him; for to whom do I owe it that I can send forth what my pen has been recording if not to Luther, the liberator of modern thought?" And this judgment is confirmed by an illustrious line of thinkers, orators and poets of every age. It would be a matter of profound astonishment if a man endowed with such qualities of mind and heart had not been a patriot in the truest sense of the word. But he was a patriot, and no self-seeking one either. He felt deeply for the people and with the people, in their suffering and distress, and sought in every way to lift them out of the mire into which they had been plunged by the rapacity of Church and state. In hot displeasure he exclaimed, "what benefit would it be to the poor man if his field bore as many florins as grains of wheat, if everything is to be taken by his master to be squandered on fine castles, fine dresses, fine eating and drinking?" With the sure instincts of a statesman he predicted the revolt of the peasants a year before it occurred, and warned the authorities that "government was not instituted for the benefit of the rulers, but for the advantage of the people." That sounds as if it had been taken from the Declaration of Independence; but it was uttered three hundred years before that document was written or the first foundation stone of this Republic was laid. If he had lived here in 1776 his blood would have stained the snows of Valley Forge with the rest of those immortal heroes.

Across the gulf of four hundred years Luther sends greeting to this generation. The events of his life are fast and secure in the irrevocable past; nothing can wrench them from the order they hold in the history of the progress of mankind. The seed he has sowed has borne a rich harvest, which

the world has garnered in a higher and better life. They remain as types of duty, as incentives to struggle on when the way is dark and steep, as examples to cherish if we cannot follow them. He chrystalized the best aspirations of the pious heart and gave them shape and form, commanding our reverend admiration. Neither distance nor time can diminish that admiration or detract from the value of their teachings. For, but it is but a thin line, if, indeed, it be not only an imaginary one, that separates the past from the present, the living from the dead, the most revered servant of humanity from the humblest toiler who does honest work to-day. He has passed into another world, but yet he is most vitally associated with the present. The gates of death open and shut, enclosing new multitudes as new multitudes press on to take the vacant place. But the unbroken stream of humanity is all one within and without those adamantine doors. We hear their voices and the vast murmur of their lives as we ourselves hasten on to join them, and living and dead form one humanity forever. And so his spirit walks the earth to-day to conduct this and succeeding generations to the table-land of the brotherhood of man.

Now, from these three general facts that he was a religious reformer, a liberator of thought and a patriot, Luther is justly entitled to the intelligent verdict of history that he advanced Christian civilization. He lifted it to a higher plane, where the free winds of Heaven might blow away what was odious in it and sweeten it with the perfume of universal charity. He pushed it onward and upward. He did not merely galvanize a corpse, but he breathed the breath of life into it and made the dry bones of the valley a living soul. The sanctities of humanity entered into it under his fostering care, and where once brutality and licentiousness prevailed, the divine accents of tenderness and pity were heard to plead for the erring and oppressed. With unsparing hand he broke the image, but with a fatherly concern he restored the reality. Yes, he imparted so great an impetus to Christian civilization that it spread its luminous waves of light to other and distant lands, and will continue to stream down the aisles of the centuries until it meets and melts in the morning rays of that

perfect day where we shall no longer "see through a glass darkly, but face to face."

An old writer once wrote: "On the theater of the world there have been many great men, some good men, but only a few both great and good." It is the eminence of Luther that he was both great and good, his life-work striking everlasting roots which leave perennial blossoms on his grave. His monument is the memory of mankind. Wherever conscience is free; wherever man, poised on the axis of personal responsibility, limited by nothing but the curve of moral law, lives to fulfill the possibilities of his creation; wherever there is deliverance from the tyranny of the past and hope for the future; wherever art, culture and religion make a trinity of virtues to refine and exalt true manhood—there, there will be found the imperishable fame of Luther, the Reformer and Patriot.